DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 082 103 CG 008 295

AUTHOR	Butler, Pamela E.
TITLE	Assertive Training: Teaching Women Not to Discriminate Against Themselves.
PUB DATE	73
NOTE	7p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Anxiety; *Behavior Change; Communication Skills; *Females; Inhibition; Males; *Sex Differences; Sex Discrimination; *Training; *Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS	*Assertive Training; Wolpe Lazarus Assertive Inventory

ABSTRACT

The process of assertive training is described with emphasis placed on its applicability to problems in female assertiveness. Male and female members of four assertive training groups were compared on the Wolpe-Lazarus assertive inventory. Male members obtained a significantly lower score than female members i.e., men reported themselves as significantly more assertive than women. Differences in specific areas of assertive behavior emerged between the sexes. Women were less able than men to set limits for themselves or express negative feelings. Men, on the other hand, had difficulty in expressing positive feelings. By focusing on nonverbal behavior, verbal behavior and communication style, autonomic response and cognitive and attitudinal variables, the study used assertive training to change these patterns of female expression. (Author/LAA)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 082103

Assertive Training: Teaching Women not to Discriminate Against Themselves

Pamela E. Butler

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CG 008 295

Assertive Training: Teaching Women not to Discriminate Against Themselves

Esther Vilar, author of The Manipulated Man, made this observation: "Women are no longer subject to the will of men. Quite the contrary. They have been given every opportunity to win their independence and, if after all this time, they have not liberated themselves and thrown off their shackles, we can only arrive at one conclusion: There are no shackles to throw off." This statement is not entirely accurate. There are other conclusions to drawn. Discrimination against women still exists. However, an interesting question is raised by Ms. Vilar's comment. If all discriminatory hiring and promotion practices against women immediately ended, would women equalize themselves in the business and professional world? I believe not. I think that a more subtle and pernicious process would continue to exist, the process of non-assertion in women, the tendency for women to hold back, to be fearful of expressing their strength, competency and power.

There is substantial evidence that women assert themselves less than men. Following a review of the literature on male-female interaction, Richey concluded when interacting with men or in groups having male members "women tend to talk less, offer fewer 'attempted answers', engage in more 'positive reactions', offer speeches of shorter duration and less elaboration, are more easily interrupted and less influential." Further, women tend to support and defend their own ideas less than men. (Hall, 1972) In a competitive situation, such a lack of assertion in expressing and supporting one's own opinions puts a woman at a distinct disadvantage.

For the past year, we have been conducting Assertive Training Groups at the Behavior Institute in Sausalito, California. Assertive training is a procedure aimed at reducing maladaptive anxiety which prevents an individual from expressing himself directly, honestly and spontaneously. The assertive

person is able to express any feeling (anger, resentment, appreciation, love) appropriate to the situation. The group participants were volunteers who came to the Institute with the specific complaint of assertive difficulty. During the course of four (10-12 session) assertive groups, we have had the opportunity to observe marked differences in the assertive problems of men and women. These differences are apparent in both the degree of assertive inhibition and in the specific areas of assertive difficutly.

Members of three assertive groups were given the Wolpe-Lazarus assertive inventory (Wolpe and Lazarus, 1966) This enabled us to get at least soft data concerning these differences. As a group, men scored significantly lower than women on this inventory ($t=2.66$, $df=16$, $p<.02$) that is, men answered fewer questions in a non-assertive direction. When the specific items of the inventory were divided into five categories: the expression of positive feelings, the expression of negative feelings, limit setting, initiation, and negative self-evaluation, a clear difference between men and women in the degree of difficulty experienced in certain areas of assertive behavior became apparent.

The percentage of males and females giving a nonassertive response was tabulated for each item. Then the items were grouped under the appropriate category. A higher percentage of women than men reported difficulty in expressing negative feelings and setting limits (% of women answering nonassertively was greater on 15 of 18 items). Women were also inclined to be more apologetic.

On the contrary, a higher percentage of men reported difficulty in expressing positive feelings (the % of men responding nonassertively was higher in 2 out of 2 cases). A similar proportion of men and women experienced difficulties in initiation i.e. beginning conversation with a stranger, expressing opinions and feelings. Interestingly, men had more difficulty expressing

their feelings while a lower percentage of women than men felt free to state their opinion.

Such trends were also apparent during the group work. The most anxiety provoking situations described by women generally involved disagreeing or expressing anger. To give an example, the following hierarchy of anxiety provoking situations was written by one woman in the group. Each item was ordered according to the degree of anxiety produced by the situation. The higher the number, the greater amount of anxiety.

1. Entering and exiting a room.
2. Making small talk with a man.
3. Initiating a conversation with a man, then holding it for a prolonged period.
4. Asserting myself with clerks, waitresses.
5. Stating an opinion that differs with anothers, then not backing down.
6. Accepting criticism.
7. Disagreeing with someone.
8. Expressing anger if I am unjustly put down.
9. Arguing with another person.
10. Expressing intense anger with husband when necessary.

A second major area of difficulty with female assertiveness seems to be the nonapologetic expression of competency, power and authority.

In increasing female assertive behavior, it is necessary to focus on four components of assertion: nonverbal behavior, verbal behavior and communicative style, autonomic response and cognitive and attitudinal variables. For example, adequate assertion in expressing negative feelings might involve change occurring in such nonverbal components as increasing direct eye contact

or not smiling when voicing resentment, in verbal behavior (that is learning to use strong assertive language), in autonomic response (lowering the anxiety associated with forcefulness or a loud voice) and also change in attitudes and cognitions.

This later element seems particularly important in female assertive difficulties. I would like to illustrate this further with an example from our group work. One softly spoken young woman was encouraged to speak louder when practicing an assertive statement. While her subsequent response was appropriate and received positive feedback from the group, she asked if she didn't "sound like a bitch." This question typifies the process of negative self-labeling: a woman punishes her own assertive behavior.

How common this process actually is remains to be determined. Our experience indicates, however, that many women minimize their power and competency by inappropriately labeling their assertiveness in a negative way (as impolite, bossy, parental). Whether this process occurs more often with woman than men is also questionable. In all likelihood, negative self-labeling by men is connected to the expression of feelings which are self-labeled as unmanly or weak.

Whenever there is an inability to assert a segment of feelings and responses, men and women operate at a loss. Until women can assert readily their strength, their competency and their power, political and economic deprivation will continue. More importantly, women will not achieve equality in their own eyes.

References

Hall, K. Sex differences in initiation and influence in decision making groups of prospective teachers. Unpublished dissertation, Stanford University, 1972.

Richey, Sheryl. Assertiveness through self reward. Unpublished manuscript, University of California at Berkeley, 1972.

Vilar, Ester. The manipulated man. Farrar, Straus and Grauix, 1973.

Wolpe, Joseph and Lazarus, Arnold. Behavior therapy techniques. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1966.